

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method, using a computer system, for determining a price for a print job, comprising the steps of:

receiving, from a buyer, a set of specifications for said print job, wherein said set of specifications specifies at least a portion of a plurality of components into which a print process is divided, said portion thus specified being required to produce said print job;

calculating a first estimated price for said print job with respect to a first printer based on pricing information provided by said first printer for each of said components thus specified;

calculating a second estimated price for said print job with respect to a second printer based on pricing information provided by said second printer for each of said components thus specified;

informing said buyer of at least a lower of said first and second estimated prices; and

informing said first and second printers of said set of specifications and an identity of said buyer so as to allow at least one of said first and second printers to contact said buyer to negotiate at least a portion of said set of specifications, wherein said buyer may select one of said first and second printers based on a negotiated set of specifications and a corresponding negotiated price.

2. A method as recited in Claim 1, further comprising the step of storing, in said computer system, said negotiated set of specifications and said corresponding negotiated price.

3. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said negotiated set of specifications is identical to said set of specifications received from said buyer and wherein said negotiated price is less than or equal to said lower of said first and second estimated prices.

4. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said negotiated set of specifications is revised by said buyer after said buyer and said selected printer agree to said negotiated set of

specifications and said corresponding negotiated price, said selected printer providing said buyer with an invoice price based on a revised set of specifications.

5. A method as recited in Claim 4, wherein said invoice price is provided to said buyer after completion of said print job.

6. A method as recited in Claim 4, further comprising the step of receiving, into said computer system, said revised set of specifications and said invoice price.

7. A method as recited in Claim 4, wherein said invoice price is itemized as to each component in said revised set of specifications.

8. A method as recited in Claim 4, further comprising the steps of:  
calculating a second estimated price with respect to said selected printer based on pricing information provided by said selected printer for each component in said revised set of specifications; and

5. comparing said second estimated price to said invoice price of said print job to determine whether said invoice price complies with said pricing information provided by said selected printer.

9. A method as recited in Claim 8, further comprising the step of penalizing said selected printer if said invoice price is substantially higher than said second estimated price.

10. A method as recited in Claim 9, wherein the step of penalizing said printer comprises the step of causing said printer to reimburse to said buyer at least a part of the difference between said invoice price and said second estimated price.

11. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said first and second printers are individually selected by said buyer.

12. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said first and second printers are selected by said computer system based on attributes desired by said buyer.

13. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said first and second printers are selected by said computer system based on geographical locations of said first and second printers relative to said buyer.

14. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said first and second printers are prequalified by said computer system to participate in the print supply marketplace.

15. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein said first and second printers are prequalified based on a plurality of qualitative factors, including at least one factor selected from the group consisting of:

business structure;  
printing capability;  
account management;  
reporting capability;  
quality certification;  
technology; and  
availability of discount pricing.

16. A method as recited in Claim 15, wherein said first and second printers are prequalified based on a quantitative evaluation including an analysis of a plurality of pricing components provided by said first and second printers.

17. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein the steps of calculating said first and second estimated prices each comprises the steps of:

calculating a manufacturing component based on pricing information provided by respective ones of said first and second printers; and  
calculating a raw material component based on paper requirements of said respective ones of said first and second printers.

18. A method as recited in Claim 17, wherein said raw material component of said first and second estimated prices is shielded from said first and second printers.

19. A method as recited in Claim 17, further comprising the step of informing a paper vendor of said set of specifications and an amount and type of paper required to produce said print job so as to allow said paper vendor to contact said buyer to negotiate at least one of said amount of paper and said type of paper to arrive at said raw material  
5 component

20. A method as recited in Claim 19, further comprising the steps of penalizing said paper vendor if said paper vendor overcharges said buyer.

21. A method, implemented on a computer system, for operating a print supply marketplace based on a pricing model, comprising the steps of:

receiving into said pricing model, pricing information for each component of a print process from each of first and second printers;

5 receiving, from a buyer, a set of specifications for a print job desired by said buyer;

determining, from said pricing model, a first set of component prices based on said set of specifications and associated with said first printer;

calculating a first price estimate based on said first set of component prices;

determining, from said pricing model, a second set of component prices based on said

10 set of specifications and associated with said second printer;

calculating a second price estimate based on said second set of component prices;

notifying said buyer of the lower of said first and second price estimates; and

providing at least one of said first and second printers with said set of specifications and respective ones of said first and second price estimates to allow said at least one of said

15 first and second printers thus provided with said set of specifications to contact said buyer and to negotiate said set of specifications and said respective price estimate.

22. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein said buyer selects one of said first and second printers to perform said print job based on a negotiated set of specifications and a corresponding negotiated price.

23. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein said steps of determining said first and second sets of component prices and said steps of calculating said first and second price estimates are performed only with respect to printers selected by said buyer.

24. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein said steps of determining said first and second sets of component prices and said steps of calculating said first and second price estimates are performed with respect to printers selected by said computer system based on attributes desired by said buyer.

25. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein said steps of determining said first and second sets of component prices and said steps of calculating said first and second price estimates are performed with respect to printers selected by said computer system based on said set of specifications.

26. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein said first and second printers are prequalified to participate in said print supply marketplace.

27. A method as recited in Claim 26, wherein said first and second printers are contractually bound to provide pricing in accordance with said pricing model.

28. A method as recited in Claim 21, wherein the one of said first and second printers selected by said buyer to perform said print job purchases raw material used in said print job from a designated vendor.

29. A method as recited in Claim 28, wherein a price of said raw material is included in said first and second price estimates.

30. A method as recited in Claim 29, wherein said buyer pays said designated vendor directly for said raw material.

31. A method, using a computer system, for ensuring compliance with a pricing model, comprising the steps of:

estimating, based on said pricing model, a first price for a print job to be printed in accordance with a first set of specifications, wherein said first set of specifications may be  
5 modified to result in a second set of specifications, said print job thus being printed in accordance with said second set of specifications;

estimating, based on said pricing model, a second price in accordance with said second set of specifications; and

comparing said second price to an invoice price of said print job to determine whether  
10 said invoice price complies with said pricing model, said invoice price complying with said pricing model if said invoice price is not substantially higher than said second price.

32. A method as recited in Claim 31, further comprising the step of penalizing a printer of said print job if said invoice price does not comply with said pricing model.

33. A method as recited in Claim 32, wherein the step of penalizing said printer comprises the step of causing said printer to reimburse to a buyer of said print job at least a part of the difference between said invoice price and said second price.

34. An apparatus for estimating a price for a print job, comprising:  
a computer system associated with a print supply marketplace; and  
a computer program, performed by said computer system, for receiving a set of specifications for said print job, calculating first and second estimated prices for said print job  
5 based on said set of specifications and pricing information provided by first and second printers, informing a buyer of said print job of at least a lower of said first and second estimated prices, and informing said first and second printers of said set of specifications and an identity of the buyer;

wherein said first or second printer can contact said buyer to negotiate at least a  
 10 portion of said set of specifications; and

wherein said buyer may select one of said first and second printers to perform said  
 print job based on a negotiated set of specifications and a corresponding negotiated price.

35. An apparatus as recited in Claim 34, further comprising:  
 a pricing database for storing said pricing information from said first and second  
 printers.

36. An apparatus as recited in Claim 34, wherein said negotiated set of  
 specifications is revised by said buyer after said buyer and said selected printer agree to said  
 negotiated set of specifications and said corresponding negotiated price, said selected printer  
 providing said buyer with an invoice price based on a revised set of specifications, said  
 5 apparatus further comprising:

a computer program for calculating a second estimated price with respect to said  
 selected printer based on pricing information provided by said selected printer for each  
 component in said revised set of specifications and comparing said second estimated price to  
 said invoice price to determine whether said invoice price complies with said pricing  
 10 information.

37. A method, using a computer system, for determining a price for a print job,  
 comprising the steps of:

receiving, from a buyer, a set of specifications for said print job, wherein said set of  
 specifications specifies at least a portion of a plurality of components into which a print  
 5 process is divided, said portion thus specified being required to produce said print job;

calculating an estimated price for said print job with respect to a printer based on  
 pricing information provided by said printer for each of said components thus specified;

informing said buyer of said estimated price; and

informing said printer of said set of specifications and an identity of said buyer so as to  
 10 allow said printer to contact said buyer to negotiate at least a portion of said set of

specifications, wherein said buyer may select said printer to perform said print job based on a negotiated set of specifications and a corresponding negotiated price.

38. A method as recited in Claim 37, wherein said negotiated set of specifications is revised by said buyer after said buyer and said printer agree to said negotiated set of specifications and said corresponding negotiated price, said printer providing said buyer with an invoice price based on a revised set of specifications.

39. A method as recited in Claim 38, further comprising the steps of:  
calculating a second estimated price with respect to said printer based on pricing information provided by said printer for each component in said revised set of specifications;  
and

5 comparing said second estimated price to said invoice price of said print job to determine whether said invoice price complies with said pricing information provided by said printer.

40. A method as recited in Claim 39, further comprising the step of penalizing said selected printer if said invoice price is substantially higher than said second estimated price.

41. A method as recited in Claim 40, wherein the step of penalizing said printer comprises the step of causing said printer to reimburse to said buyer at least a part of the difference between said invoice price and said second estimated price.